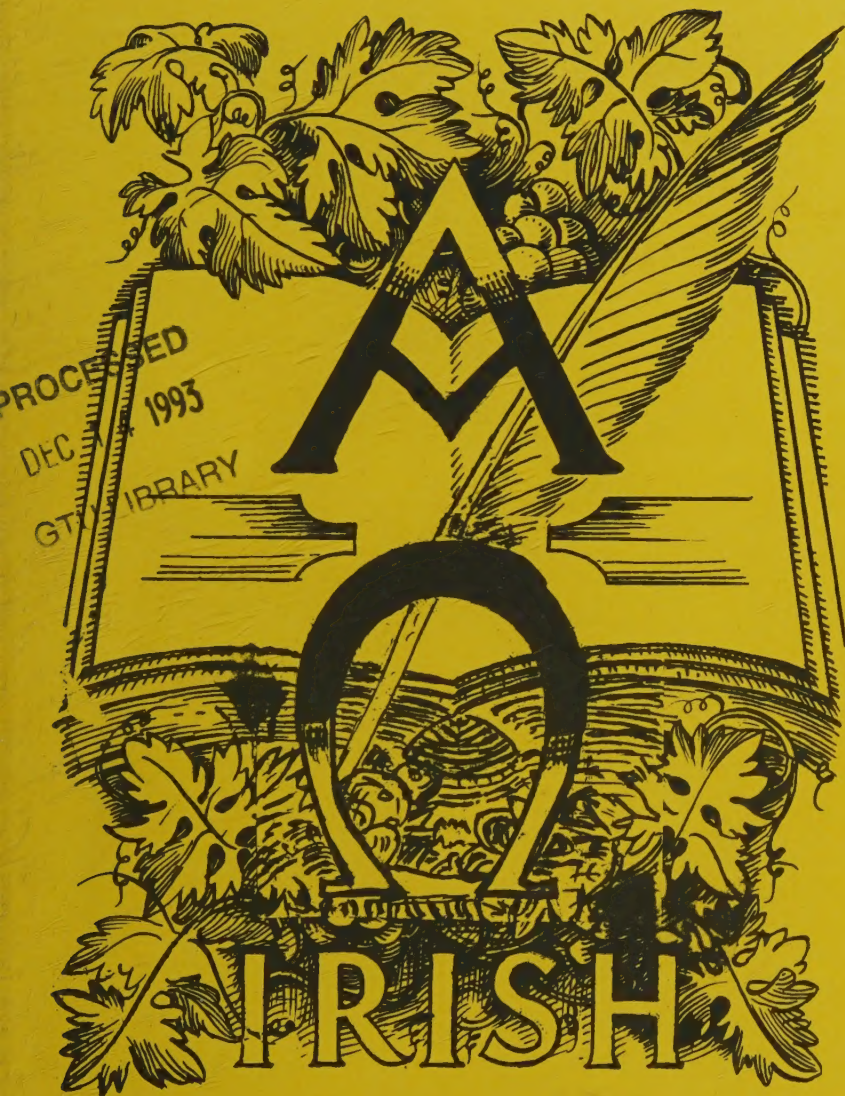


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## Ministry in Ephesians

Reverend Professor Ernest Best

Note the title: this is a discussion of ministry and not of the ministry in Ephesians, though naturally a good part of the discussion of this essay will be occupied with the latter aspect of the subject. There are at least two possible approaches to the study of ministry; the sociological treats how leadership arises and how it and officials function within the group to which they belong; the theological the place of ministry in the plan of God for his church. In fact these two approaches can never be wholly separated but attention will be focussed on the second, the theological aspect, because this at first sight appears to be the approach of the author of Ephesians. In this essay it is assumed that Ephesians was not written by Paul, but even if he was its author the argument would hardly alter. Attention will however be drawn to the few points where his authorship might make a difference to the conclusions. It is also assumed that the letter was written not to one congregation but to a number, probably lying in Asia Minor.

### *Fulfilled Ministries*

In Ephesians two forms of ministry are set out whose activity is regarded as already complete, though this does not mean their holders are dead. In 2.20 and 3.5 it is implied that the ministry of apostles and prophets is in certain important respects over. In 2.20 they are termed the foundation of the church, and a foundation can only be laid once; in 3.5 they are said to be the recipients of the revelation that the gospel is for Gentiles as well as Jews; once this truth has been made known and accepted there is no need for it to be revealed again. In those senses then the ministry of apostles and prophets belongs to the past.

The word apostle<sup>1</sup> has a wide range of meaning in the N.T. In the Gospels it is limited to the Twelve whom Jesus chose to be

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<sup>1</sup> Out of the vast literature on this word it is sufficient to point to W. Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church*, London, 1969; C.K. Barrett, *The Signs of an Apostle*, London 1970; R. Schnackenburg, 'Apostles Before and During Paul's Time', in *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (FS F.F. Bruce, ed W.W. Gasque and R.P. Martin), Exeter. 1970,



especially close to him. Elsewhere at the other extreme it is used of the messengers of the churches (2 Cor. 8.23; Phil. 2.25). In between these extremes it is applied to Paul (Eph 1.1) who was not one of the Twelve, and it should be noted that not all Christians were prepared to grant Paul an equivalence with the Twelve (2 Cor. 12.11; Rev. 21.12-14 implies there are only twelve apostles), to some of his associates, Silvanus and Timothy (2 Thess. 2.6), Barnabas (Acts 14.4,14), and to Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16.7) of whom we know relatively little except that Junia was a woman. In Eph. 3.5 the reference is clearly to the Twelve. The revelation that the gospel was intended for all peoples is given to them in varying forms as can be seen from the end of the Gospels and the beginning of Acts. Paul does not seem to be included in 3.5 for in 3.3 he speaks of a special revelation of the same truth granted to himself. The definition of apostle as meaning one of the Twelve probably also underlies 2.20; tradition accords to the Twelve a unique position in relation to Christ as his first followers; all later disciples depend on them; they can thus rightly be described as the foundation.

All this is straightforward, but the same cannot be said in relation to the prophets<sup>2</sup> who in both 2.20 and 3.5 are associated with the apostles. There are many references to prophets and prophecy as existing in the New Testament church (e.g. Acts 13.1; 21.9; 1 Cor. 14.1ff) and prophets were certainly honoured by the first Christians; yet a continuing group or a continuing activity can

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287-303; J.H. Schültz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (SNTS monograph series 26), Cambridge, 1975; H. Merklein, *Das kirchliche Amt nach dem Epheserbrief*, Munich, 1973, pp.288ff.

2 On prophets and prophecy see D. Hill, *New Testament Prophecy*, London, 1979; D.E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, Grand Rapids, 1983; G. Dautzenberg, *Urchristliche Prophetie. Ihre Erforschung, ihre Voraussetzungen im Judentum und ihre Struktur im ersten Korintherbrief*, Stuttgart, 1975; U.B. Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt im Neuen Testament, Formgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur urchristlich Prophetie*, Gütersloh, 1975; Merklein, op.cit., pp.306ff.,

hardly be intended with the references in Ephesians; the foundation has been laid once-for-all and will not go on being laid. For this reason some commentators have identified the prophets here with those of the Old Testament. Of these, at least in Christian eyes, there can be no more; they are a past group; but of course what they said and wrote was influential in the church and might be regarded as foundational. If however the O.T. prophets were intended the order 'prophets and apostles' would have been expected. The books of the prophets are moreover not the only books of the O.T.; 'The Law and the Prophets' would have been the proper phrase to denote O.T. revelation. In any case the O.T. prophets were hardly the recipients of the revelation to evangelize the Gentiles.

If the O.T. prophets have to be ruled out of consideration who then were the prophets who could be regarded both as the foundation of the church and as the recipients of the revelation that the gospel was not for Jews alone but for all? Is there any way in which we can see prophets as associated with this revelation? We should first note that there was a recognized class of prophets (Acts 13.1; 1 Cor 12.28) and prophets were not necessarily just believers who from time to time were inspired by the Spirit. Since prophets were normally regarded as offering directions for the way in which the church should move (Acts 13.1-3 shows them as involved in the sending out of missionaries to preach to Gentiles, thus shaping its existence and future nature) they may have been more widely involved in the movement towards the Gentiles than is sometimes thought. Matt. 28.16-20; Luke 24.47-9; Acts 1.8; John 20.21b all offer the revelation but in verbally different forms. Since no heed seems to have been paid to this revelation until much later when the Gospel began to be preached to the Gentiles at Antioch (Acts 11.19f) the verbalisation of the commission may have been later than the end of the earthly life of the risen Jesus<sup>3</sup>; in this case prophets, receiving the word of the exalted Christ, spoke it to believers, and later the commission was associated with the earthly Christ. Prophets might then have been identified with the revelation in some strands of tradition and Eph. 3.5 may represent

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<sup>3</sup> See Best, 'The Revelation to Evangelize the Gentiles', *JTS* 35 (1984) 1-30.



such a strand. There is another way in which we may see how believers may have seen them as related to the beginning of the church. Revelation describes itself as a prophecy (Rev. 1.3; 22.7,10,18,19) suggesting that prophets have a role in relation to the forecasting of the nature of the End. That this is so is confirmed by the references to them in the Markan Apoclyypse (13.22). If 1 Thess.4.15-16, or some part of it, comes not from the incarnate Christ but represents a prophetic saying, we have again a connection between prophets and the End. May it not be that a part of the foundation of the church is the certainty that it has an end in the purpose of God and that that end is carefully planned? A planned end for a group will always shape the course of its life from its beginning.

### *Continuing Ministries*

In 4.11 five different ministries or leadership roles are named, apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. We have already looked at the first two of these and seen that they were not ministries designed to continue for all time, though there may be still those in the church who were termed apostles and those who prophesied. 2.20 and 3.5 imply strongly that those called apostles and prophets filled foundational roles and were not contemporary with the author and his readers. Even if Paul is the author the apostolic role in view is not that of a general government of the church but of something that happened at the beginning and only then. We do not need therefore to consider the apostles and prophets again but can turn our attention to the remaining three 'officials' (it is difficult to know what title to give them; it could be leaders, ministers, officials, office-bearers; we shall use all these from time to time) whose work was certainly a present reality for the author of Ephesians and his readers.

Before considering the remaining names in the list we need to set the list in its context. In 4.7 the author said that grace had been given to every church member by Christ; this is very similar to what is said about charismatic gifts in 1 Corinthians 12.1ff. 4.7 is then justified with a quotation in 4.8; the quotation depends in some way on Ps 68.18, though it does not use the exact words of the Psalm. Verses 9,10 then expand the quotation. Now at v.11 the author

appears to return to what he had said in 4.7 but with a significant variation. The gifts are no longer universal and intended for all believers; Christ instead is said to give certain people to the church; the gifts are not the ability to perform various functions as in 1 Corinthians 12 but are the people themselves (apostles, prophets, etc.); the church is not explicitly mentioned but the succeeding verses show that it is it which is the recipient of the gifts. There is another significant variation from 1 Corinthians; there it was God who was said to appoint the leaders of the church (12.28); here it is Christ. Although no mention is made of a grace being bestowed on those Christ has chosen it may be assumed that the charisma appropriate to the role which each is to play will have been given (cf Calvin). The change of emphasis from v.7 in relation to people as gifts rather than 'graces' was however already foreshadowed in 1 Cor 12.4-30 which began by enumerating the various charismata with which different members of the community might be endowed but ended in vv.28f by enumerating identifiable leaders, apostles, prophets, teachers; after listing these first three Paul apparently ran out of 'titles' and went on by listing functions. Since none of the 'titles' is explained we may assume that Paul's Corinthian readers were familiar with them. The same must be true of the leaders mentioned in our verse in respect of the readers of Ephesians.

There is no need then for our purpose to ask whether the author of Ephesians saw the leaders he identifies as present in the church from the beginning, or to attempt to trace out the origin of each title in its earlier history. The author is dealing with his current situation; it is sufficient to realise they were titles known to him and his readers. There is also no need for us to cross-identify his titles with those in other parts of the N.T. (e.g. with bishops, deacons and elders). In the first century the situation in respect of ministry was fluid; it was only after the time of Ephesians that titles and the functions attached to them began to harden. It is sufficient to note that the titles are not mutually exclusive; Paul is termed both apostle and teacher in 1 Tim. 2.7 (cf Acts 15.35). Indeed Ephesians does nothing to distinguish between the functions of those that are listed; they are considered as a group and not in respect of their



individual contributions.<sup>4</sup> Our author's list is limited to five names, three of which are those mentioned in 1 Cor 12.28, though there is no reason to suppose that he was directly dependent thereon; they appear in other parts of the NT.

The list is enumerated and distinguished by means of μέν ... δέ ... δέ <sup>5</sup>... An article is associated with each title; it is probably not to be understood in the sense 'he gave some to be ...' but rather 'he gave those who are ...'. Does the initial μέν serve to contrast the apostles with the others in the list (so Schnackenburg<sup>6</sup>)? It does not do so in the enumerations of Matt. 13.4-7; 13.8; 16.14; 21.35. Had AE intended this contrast he would have chosen a stronger particle to distinguish the first name from the rest or a fresh μέν with following δέ ... δε ... to differentiate the other names from one another. Moreover in 2.20; 3.5 apostles and prophets are held together as a group.

Apostles and prophets in 2.20 and 3.5 are, as we have seen, figures of the past, though the aorist ἔδωκεν cannot be used to support this otherwise the evangelists, shepherds and teachers would also be confined to the past. As we have seen the term apostle was not limited to the twelve and there were still people so named at the beginning of the second century (cf *Didache* 11.3-12); prophets appear regularly as active in the N.T. period. May apostles and prophets in v.11 then unlike 2.20 and 3.5 not be seen as a continuing gift to the church? May the missionary who took the gospel to a fresh area not be regarded as its initiating or founding apostle (William Carey has been termed the apostle to India)? There is a possible ambiguity here. If Paul wrote the letter he is still alive and if another author wrote in Paul's name he has to sustain

<sup>4</sup> E. D. Roels, *God's Mission*, Franeker, 1962, p. 185.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Blass, Debrunner, Rehkopf, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, Göttingen, 1976, §250; Moulton, Howard, Turner, *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Edinburgh, 1963, pp.36f; A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, New York, 1919, pp.1152f.

<sup>6</sup> So R. Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (E.T.), Edinburgh, 1991, ad loc.

the view that Paul is still alive. So no simple distinction can be drawn between apostles and the other ministers listed; the last three certainly still exist and if apostles still do they are not the apostles of 2.20 and 3.5.

In 1 Cor 12.28 others were named in addition to apostles and prophets; AE also extends the list beyond them. The first additional category is that of the evangelist.<sup>7</sup> If this term is understood to refer to the authors of the Gospels then certainly it would represent a ministry like that of apostle and prophet which belonged to the past. It was however apparently first used with this sense by Hippolytus, *De Antichristo* 56 and Tertullian *Adv Praxeian* 23. It is hardly likely that Gospels were in existence in sufficient number by the time of Ephesians for this understanding of the word to have appeared. Today the word is regularly applied to those who conduct missions in existing Christian countries. It was previously used widely of those who travelled as missionaries taking the gospel into fresh areas, and in this sense many commentators regard the evangelists as successors to the apostles. If we were to accept this latter idea there is no reason to go further with Klauck<sup>8</sup> and suppose that shepherd and teachers have taken over the work of prophets. But to see the evangelist as missionary to unbelievers does not fit the context of Ephesians which continues in v.12 to signify the ministry of all those that it names as directed towards the saints. The term needs therefore some further investigation.

The word evangelist appears only twice in the NT. Acts 21.8 applies it to Philip whose work as a travelling missionary is recorded in Acts 8.4ff, yet at the time when he is termed evangelist in 21.8 he has an established home and his family are living with him in it; he is then no longer a travelling missionary. In 2 Tim. 4.5 Timothy is told to do the work of an evangelist and this appears to be equated with fulfilling his ministry and not be the title of an office.<sup>9</sup> When we look at 1 and 2 Timothy to see what roles

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<sup>7</sup> For the word see G., Friedrich, *TDNT* II, 736f.

<sup>8</sup> H.-J. Klauck, 'Das Amt in der Kirche nach Eph 4,1-16', *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 36 (1973) 81-110.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Merklein, *op.cit.*, 346



Timothy was to fulfil we find he is expected to remain at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1.3), i.e. not to travel, to correct false doctrine (1 Tim. 1.3f; 4.1f; 2 Tim. 2.23; 3.1ff), to see to the appointment of suitable people as bishops and deacons (1 Tim. 3.1ff; 2 Tim. 2.2), which suggests the oversight of individual congregations in an area rather than travelling into new areas where the gospel was not yet known; he is also to set an example to others through his conduct (1 Tim. 4.12), to take charge of preaching and teaching and to be particularly diligent in respect of his own (1 Tim. 4.11-16); and he is to give moral teaching to various groups and to believers generally (1 Tim. 5.1ff; 2 Tim. 2.14ff). He is never instructed to seek the conversion of unbelievers. His ministry is accordingly related entirely to those who are already within the church (2 Tim. 4.2 offers a good summary) and it is within the church that he does the work of an evangelist.

The use of the word 'evangelist' in the N.T. provides then no direct evidence that it denotes travelling missionaries. The non-Christian evidence is too slender to provide any clue to its meaning. Apart from coming later to denote the writers of the Gospels the word almost disappears from the Christian vocabulary. Eusebius applies it to Pantaenus who in imitation of the apostles was a missionary in India (*EH* V 10.1ff; cf. III 37.1ff). If then we are to seek out what being an evangelist signifies we need to go to the root from which it is derived, gospel, εὐαγγέλιον. That this regularly denotes the content of what is proclaimed to unbelievers needs no proof; it is however also used in relation to what goes on within a believing community (Rom. 1.15; 1 Cor. 9.14; 2 Cor. 11.7; Gal. 2.14; Phil. 1.27); Mark uses the word to describe his Gospel (1.1) and that Gospel is addressed to believers; Mark also says that Jesus went about preaching the gospel (1.14) yet he continually refers to what Jesus does as teaching; he also uses the word in his appeal for more dedicated lives from believers (8.35). Paul is still preaching the cross to believers (1 Corinthians 1-4); in 2 Cor. 8.9 he proclaims the gospel to overcome a worsening financial situation within the church (it may not be the way we would state the gospel but it is a way of putting it relevant to the situation). Other statements of the gospel are used in exhorting in various ways those who are Christians (Phil. 2.6-11; 1 Cor. 15.3-5; 1 Tim. 3.16). On

the other hand as if to mock our careful differentiation between the roles fulfilled by different ministers Paul's evangelizing of Sergius Paulus is described as teaching (Acts 13.12). Any division between ministries to the world and to the church breaks down again in 2 Cor. 5.20 where Christians are assumed to stand in need of reconciliation.

The gospel then speaks as much to believers as to unbelievers; they continually need to be reminded of it as Kate Hankey's hymn 'Tell me the old old story ...' drives home. There is no point in their lives at which believers no longer need to go back to gospel fundamentals. Ephesians itself provides a good example of this for in 5.2 its readers are brought back to the gospel when God's claim on their lives is set before them. There is then no reason to suppose that evangelists are regarded in Ephesians as directing all their activity towards unbelievers, still less to suppose that they are mentioned because the communities to which the letter was written had come into being through their activity,<sup>10</sup> though that is not to say that this was not the way they came into being. It would of course be wrong to exclude evangelists from work directed towards unbelievers; as preachers they go both to the unconverted and the converted.<sup>11</sup> Paul the apostle exercised that same dual role and in that sense evangelists might be regarded as successors to the apostle.

There is moreover some confirmatory evidence from the early church that evangelists worked within the Christian community as well as outside it. The term is used in the *Apostolic Church Order* or *Apostolic Canons* 19 in relation to the office of reader in the early church; he is told to bear in mind that he takes the place of an evangelist, εἰδὼς ὅτι εὐαγγελιστοῦ τόπον ἐργάζεται. Harnack believes that the reference to the reader belongs to one of the second century sources of the *Church*

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<sup>10</sup> So H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, Düsseldorf, 1971, ad loc; A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary), Dallas, 1990, ad loc.

<sup>11</sup> So J.E. Belser, *Der Epheserbrief des Apostels Paulus*, Freiburg, 1908, ad loc.



*Order*.<sup>12</sup> In the *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII 22 (cf 28) when the reader is set apart the prayer requests for him a prophetic spirit, which would hardly be necessary if all that was required from him was a clear voice (cf. Cyprian, *Ep.* 39.5; 29). When Origen expands Eph. 4.11 in his Johannine commentary (I.5; see GCS 10.7.8ff) he clearly regards the evangelist as operating within the church; in his commentary on Eph. 4.11 in relation to the evangelist he alludes to Isa. 52.7 where the good news is brought to Zion and not to non-Israelites.<sup>13</sup> We can thus conclude that at least part of the work of the evangelist lay within the congregation.

The remaining two names in the list, shepherds and teachers, are closely linked through a single article and καί. Have we then two groups of people each fulfilling a separate and distinct role or one group exercising two roles? This question must be left until we have identified the roles indicated by each word. Since the role of the teacher is easier to envisage we begin with it.

Teachers<sup>14</sup> follow apostles and prophets in the list of 1 Cor. 12.28 (cf 14.26) and their work appears among the charismata listed in Rom. 12.7. The existence of 'specialist' teachers is confirmed by Gal. 6.6; Jas. 3.1; Barnabas 1.8; 4.9; Hermas *Sim.* ix 15.4. The activity of teaching is referred to frequently in the Pastorals and is an important part of the work of Timothy and Titus (1 Tim. 2.12; 4.6,11,13,16; 5.17; 6.2; 2 Tim. 2.2; 4.3; Tit. 1.9; 2.1,7). The writer of our letter was presumably himself fulfilling the role of a teacher when he wrote.<sup>15</sup> Teachers will have passed on tradition which they deduced from the O.T. (2 Tim. 3.16) or received from earlier Christians (cf Rom. 6.17; 1 Cor. 4.17; Col. 2.7; 2 Thess. 2.15) and then related it to their contemporary situation; they will also have looked deeply into that tradition and drawn lessons from it for the

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<sup>12</sup> A. Harnack, 'Die Quellen der sogenannten apostolischen Kirchenordnung', *TU* II.2 (1886); cf A.J. Maclean, 'The Ancient Church Order' *JTS* 3 (1901) 61-73.

<sup>13</sup> See J. A. F. Gregg, *JTS* 3 (1902) 413f

<sup>14</sup> See A.F. Zimmermann, *Die urchristlichen Lehrer* (WUNT 2.Reihe 12), Tübingen, 1984, especially pp. 92-118.

<sup>15</sup> Merklein, *op.cit.*, p. 350

new areas of life with their new problems which believers were constantly facing. The task of teachers cannot however be confined to imparting information or opening up new ways of thought but will always have included exhortation that their hearers should live by what they taught (Eph. 4.20f). In that sense they will have been leaders in their congregations. Gentiles will necessarily have had much to learn when they became Christians; in 4.20 they are depicted as 'learning' Christ. Apart from designated teachers every Christian was expected to be a teacher (Heb. 5.12; Col. 3.16).

This seems relatively clear but clarity disappears once we turn to the term linked with teachers, ποιμένες. It is better to translate this as 'shepherds' rather than the normal rendering 'pastors'; in this way we retain the original underlying image and avoid all the overtones surrounding the modern use of 'pastor'. However in using 'shepherd' we need to recognize that the image which it evokes in a modern Westerner differs in one important respect from the original: in the West shepherds generally drive their sheep, in the East they lead them. The shepherd image appears to have entered Jewish thought from its use in the Near East of rulers who led their people.<sup>16</sup> It was also used in this way in Greco-Roman culture though not as widely; it is in fact so obvious a metaphor that the readers of the letter would have had no difficulty in picking up its nuance, especially in the light of its frequent appearance in the O.T. which was now their main religious book. There the image was applied to God (Gen. 49.24; Ps. 23.1; 80.1; Isa. 40.11), though the word shepherd itself was not always used (Jer. 50.19; Isa. 49.10). It denoted the way he cared for and protected his people (cf 1 Sam. 17.34ff). In the N.T. the image was transferred and applied to Christ rather than God (1 Pet. 2.25; Heb. 13.20; John 10.1-10; Mark 6.34; 14.27; Matt. 25.32). Either in parallel to its non-Jewish

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<sup>16</sup> Cf J. Jeremias, *TDNT* VI 485-502; R. Schnackenburg, 'Episcopos und Hirtenamt: Zu Apg 20.28' in his *Schriften zum Neuen Testament*, München, 1971, pp. 247-67; K. Kertelge, 'Offene Fragen zum Thema "Geistliches Am" und das neutestamentliche Verständnis von der "Repraesentatio Christi"' in *Die Kirche des Anfangs* (FS Heinz Schürmann ed R. Schnackenburg, J. Ernst, J. Wanke), Freiberg, Basel, Wien, 1978, pp.583-605.



use in the Near East or as a result of its application to God it was also applied in the O.T. to the activity of leaders in Israel (2 Sam. 5.2; Ps. 78.71; Jer. 2.8; 3.15; Ezek. 34.2), and then in the N.T. applied to church leaders (John 21.16; Acts 20.28; 1 Pet. 5.2); the church itself is described as a flock of sheep (John 10.2ff; 21.16; Acts 20.28; 1 Pet. 5.2; cf Jer. 23.2f; 50.6,17). Eph. 4.11 is however the only place in the N.T. where the noun is used of church officials. The image is vague; its O.T. and pre-O.T. usage would suggest that primary emphasis would lie on shepherds as those who led, provided for and protected those in their care. Yet when carrying out these duties shepherds in the church would have had to preach and teach, that is fulfil the functions of evangelists and teachers. In order to differentiate them in some way from the latter it is probably right to stress either the element of leadership or that of general oversight (Acts 20.28; 1 Pet. 5.2; yet John 21.16 hardly relates to leadership or oversight). Perhaps it is wrong to attempt to draw rigid distinctions between the three groups, evangelists, shepherds, teachers; in the modern church most priests and ministers exercise all these roles from time to time. This suggests we see evangelising, shepherding and teaching as three essential ministerial functions. Some distinction exists between evangelising on the one hand and shepherding and teaching on the other in that the second and third functions are exercised entirely within the community but the first both inside and outside it.

This perhaps offers a clue to a question raised earlier but left aside, Are shepherds and teachers one group or two (the idea that only one group is described goes back as far as Jerome)? Shepherding and teaching are different functions yet the same people could exercise both from time to time. Leadership involves truth, i.e. correct teaching, for the leader has to say in what direction he wishes to lead, and teaching involves leadership for the teacher must be seen to be leading others in the way he or she advocates; teachers are more than academics providing information! Such an explanation is preferable to that which regards pastors and teachers as local officials whereas evangelists operate in a wider area (the latter explanation goes back to Chrysostom and Theodoret; see their commentaries on Ephesians). It is true that one article governs both teachers and shepherds; of itself this does not prove

they are one group for one article also governs apostles and prophets in 2.20 and there we have two groups. If then we accept the idea that two groups are envisaged we should not think of a rigid separation between them. In new movements leadership in its various aspects, and teaching and exhortation must be included among these, is flexible and only hardens into fixed categories with the passage of time. The later church certainly shows the development of more specialised ministerial roles, but for our purposes there is no need to trace out their appearance. It is sufficient to say that Ephesians offers no template for today's ministry.

There is then in v.11 a list involving both the names of officials and describing their functions. Does this mean that our author believes he has set out an exclusive list of officials and functions? He does not mention presbyters, deacons and bishops. When he wishes to he can make clear that his lists are non-exclusive (see 1.21 and 6.12 where we have two lists each ending with a generalising term). He probably intends then that the list should be taken as exclusive. Yet it would be wrong to accept the conclusion of Fischer,<sup>17</sup> that our author's omission of bishops was a deliberate attempt to preserve the Pauline conception of ministry, for there is little else in the letter to support such an idea.

If the list is exclusive we need to go further and ask if preaching, ruling and teaching were the only ministries within the church of that time in the group of congregations to which the letter is addressed? Certainly these three appear to be ministries, or functions, whichever we term them, which the church has always retained; their nature is permanent if the titles identifying them are not. All three appear at first sight to be ministries possessing a primary verbal orientation, yet there are other verbal ministries, e.g. prophecy. Prophets continued in the church at least to the end of the first century (*Didache* 13.1f; 15.1f). Perhaps our author having mentioned prophets as part of the foundation of the church did not wish to mention them again lest there would be confusion. But

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17 K.M. Fischer, *Tendenz und Absicht des Epheserbriefes* (FRLANT 111), Göttingen, 1973, pp. 15f, 21f. 38f.



were there not also important non-verbal ministries? Before we turn to examine this question it is interesting to observe that none of those listed in v.11 is specifically described as a leader, though in other letters words are used indicating leadership (1 Thess. 5.12; 1 Cor. 12.28; Rom. 12.8; Heb. 13.7,17). Leadership in the narrow sense of what is required to hold a community together and direct it in the way it should go may then have belonged to all three of evangelists, teachers and shepherds; we can exclude apostles and prophets as no longer active; if they had been they too would have shared in leadership. The same would have been true of 'rulers' if they had been explicitly mentioned. Interestingly the letter does not suggest that ruling lay within the ambit of apostles; they are 'foundations' and receive revelations (2.20; 3.5). Perhaps the writer of the letter was not worried about the exercise of authority by some Christians over others.

1 Pet. 4.11 distinguishes between charismata relating to speech and to practical service. The latter area of activity also appears in Rom. 12.7f; 1 Cor. 12.9f,28. It may be summed up in the phrase 'loving service' for which the key word is often taken to be διακονία. Loving service is advocated for all believers in the paraenetic section of Ephesians (e.g. in 4.28,32; 6.18) and is of course what should be taking place in the various areas which the *Haustafel* (5.22-6.9) treats; but it is apparently not seen as belonging to the duty of particular officials as it was in Acts 6.1-6. Grotius in his commentary noting the omission of workers of miracles justified this on the grounds that their work did nothing to equip or prepare the saints. Yet even if we allow this in respect of those who heal or speak in tongues (and not all would allow this) it cannot be extended to cover all forms of loving care. Schnackenburg,<sup>18</sup> suggests that the teaching and shepherding ministries are mentioned because of the danger of false belief (cf v.14), yet 'caring' ministries by their love can also preserve others from straying into false ways, especially if those false ways relate to matters of conduct rather than doctrine; it is indeed probable that the disturbance which appears to threaten the church (4.14) comes from false ethical teaching rather than erroneous doctrine; the danger from false doctrine never looms large in this letter. Verses

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18 *Ephesians*, 190f.

12-16 suggest that one reason for the existence of ministers is the need to build up the community and draw the members together in unity; loving service will do this as effectively as teaching and shepherding. Worship may do the same; its conduct is not however linked to a limited number of 'officials'; 5.19 is the only place where it is mentioned and there appears to be something for all believers. Prayer is also a ministry open to all (6.18f).

The Eucharist which many modern theologians would regard as the principal means of expressing and sustaining church unity is nowhere mentioned in the letter, least of all in connection with the officials, but this may possibly be because the list primarily denotes functions rather than people. We do not know enough about who presided over the eucharist in this period to say whether this lay within the sphere of teacher or shepherd, or even if it was held to be important that some particular person should officiate. In his instructions on the conduct of the Eucharist Paul does not say who should preside (1 Cor. 11.22ff); it may well have been the householder in whose house the church met. In the *Didache* (9.1-10.7) while instructions are given about the conduct of the Eucharist nothing is said that would suggest there was an appointed official to preside, except that there is an implication in 10.7 that a prophet if present should do this. The way also in which the prayers to be used at the Eucharist are presented as if it was open to all readers to pray suggests that anyone might preside. This also applies to baptism. Ignatius seems to accept bishops, whether as individuals or as pre-eminent among a group of elders, as important and it may be that they would have presided at the Eucharist. Certainly by the time of Justin Martyr there was a definite president (*Apol* 1.67). The centralisation of power is a common phenomenon in groups as they grow and develop. So far as baptism goes Paul does not appear to have been concerned about who should officiate for in Corinth after his initial baptism of the first few believers he left the administration of the rite to others without laying down rules about who should do it (1 Cor. 1.14-16). All this implies the impossibility of drawing up guide lines for the modern ministry from Ephesians. In keeping with this is the absence of any reference to the choice and appointment of shepherds, evangelists and teachers; there is no reason to doubt that

some method or methods did exist (cf Acts 13.1-3; 1 Tim. 4.14) but the writer's failure to refer to these matters suggests that he did not think methods of choice and appointment were important.

Evangelists, teachers, shepherds are clearly distinct from those, all believers, who receive charismata to be used for the good of the community (v.7), and the groups are therefore in the nature of permanent 'officials'. By its introduction of 'officials' Ephesians may be said to have hastened the division between clergy and laity, begun the sacralisation of the ministry and at the same time to have supported the idea that ministry of a non-spontaneous nature was necessary for the good estate of the church. It should also be noted that the existence of ministry is assumed without positive argument in its favour which suggests that its existence was not an issue within the communities to which the letter was written. This is in accordance with sociological theory that groups as they grow produce their own leadership and can have no long-term existence without permanent leaders.

Since no mention is made either of the manner of choice of leaders or of a ceremony of appointment all the stress lies on their selection by Christ. It was important for their own encouragement that evangelists, shepherds and teachers should know that they had been selected and given to the church by Christ. Dependence on Christ would enable them to hold steady when things were difficult. Knowledge that Christ had selected them would also help their communities to accept and respect them even if their words and actions were at times disliked.

It is impossible to tell whether the author thinks only of men as holding these appointments. διδάσκαλος<sup>19</sup> is of common gender; there is apparently no regular separate feminine noun denoting shepherdesses<sup>20</sup> and yet there must have been shepherdesses in the rural economy of the ancient world; εὐαγγελιστής is too rare a word for any deduction to be drawn. The communities certainly contained women as the instruction on

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19 See Liddell, Scott, Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v.

20 *ibid.* s.v.



marriage shows (5.22-33), yet the community can be addressed as if all were males (6.23). The author may not have been worried about the sexual orientation of the officials he mentions.

Granted the existence of these officials what does the writer of Ephesians envisage as their function? Since he does not distinguish between their roles we can only ask after their function as a group. His answer comes in v.12 where there are three prepositional phrases each indicating purpose; the first is introduced with πρὸς and the other two with εἰς. Controversy has centered round the relation of these phrases to one another as may be seen from the renderings of KJV and NRSV; the former regards them as parallel and thus makes all three relate to the function of the leaders; the latter, in accordance with the variation in preposition, makes only the first relate to the 'ministers' and the second and third to the saints who are mentioned in the first. Verse 13 certainly refers to the life of the whole community. Somewhere therefore within v.12 or at its conclusion there must be a movement from 'ministers' to 'saints'. Even if we assume that all three phrases relate to the role of the officials there is however no reason to distinguish between the phrases and attach each one to a different official. For our purposes it is unnecessary to follow out the controversy as to the place where the change takes place; it is sufficient to note that the role of the leaders relates to the saints and to see what the first clause means; indeed even if the other phrases also relate to the officials little is added to what the first phrase tells us. Its meaning centres on καταρτισμός. This is the noun's only occurrence in the N.T. though the cognate verb is found fairly regularly. Noun and verb have several related meanings:<sup>21</sup> 'repairing' (Matt. 4.19; Mark 1.19), 'setting broken bones', 'equipping, preparing', 'training, disciplining'. Only the last two groups of senses are appropriate to 4.12. Of these the final sense would apply strictly only to the teachers of v.11; it is therefore best to choose the sense of equipping or preparing which can be associated with any of the roles of the leaders. Their function is then to enable the saints to carry out their ministry. The ministry of

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<sup>21</sup> See Liddell, Scott and Jones, s.v.

the officials does not find its fulfilment in their own existence but only in the activity of preparing others to minister.

### *The ministry of the saints*

In very general terms this may be described as a building up of the whole body of the church in love (4.12,16). Its purpose is presented both positively (v.13) and negatively (v.14) and the source of strength to achieve this end comes in vv.15f. The strength is from Christ who supplies both grace to the members of his body for their various activities (v.7) and everything they require so that all may grow in love (vv.15f). No description is however given here of the way the saints are to exercise their ministry; this needs to be gleaned from other parts of the letter.

In 5.19 they are instructed to address one another with psalms, hymns and various other spiritual songs. It should be noted that their singing is described here as addressed to one another and not, as we might expect, to God and although antiphonal singing was well known<sup>22</sup> in the ancient world this is not what is envisaged here; had our author intended it he would have made himself clearer. It is probably impossible to distinguish satisfactorily between the three song types which he names; they are probably intended to cover all the singing in public worship which was addressed to other believers. Fixed forms may have been used (5.14 is part of a Christian hymn) and there may have also been spontaneous or charismatic singing. The songs will have been directed at others to encourage them in their contests with evil and to instruct them in the gospel; in a sense those who used them will have been fulfilling the roles of the leaders of v.11. As well however as addressing one another believers in some of their songs will have praised God (v.20). Nothing is said about the role of the leaders in the directing of such thanksgiving or worship in general. What is described is a ministry of the laity. In their thanksgiving believers would remember among other things, their election by God, their redemption through the blood of Christ, their

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<sup>22</sup> Cf Ezra 3.11; Philo, *De Vita Contempletiva* 84; Pliny, *Epistles* X 96.

resurrection with Christ into the heavenly places, indeed all the themes of salvation that are mentioned in the first three chapters.

A further item in the ministry of all believers is presented in v.21. This verse is difficult to set in its context; it leads on to the *Haustafel* of 5.22-6.9 but is also governed by the same principal verb as vv.19f. It must in part at least be taken with vv.19f and indicate a mutual relationship which is wider than that found within the household; the latter is treated in the *Haustafel*. The concept of mutuality between believers is a common N.T. theme; its best known expression is the Johannine form of the love commandment (John 13.34f). Ephesians shows it as involving mutual forbearance, meekness and lowliness (4.2) and the willingness to forgive one another (4.32). In 5.21 a strong verb, ὑποτάσσω, signifying subordination, is used to denote it. Subordination implies a sense of order in society and in our context will of course be voluntary. Its best illustration is provided by the way Jesus washed the feet of his disciples (John 13.1ff). It is not an easy attitude to attain and it is important therefore to note that our verse is still controlled by the reference to the Holy Spirit in v.18; it is impossible without the assistance of the Spirit.

The ministry of believers is not however restricted to mutual forbearance; it has a more active side. Believers should not slander one another nor titillate each other with smutty talk (4.29,31); they should not lose their tempers with one another and should speak the truth at all times to one another (4.25-27); they should contribute in practical ways to the physical needs of one another (4.28).<sup>23</sup> All this covers a wide range of activity which was not even glanced at in the discussion of the roles of their leaders.

### *The ministry of Paul*

Paul fulfilled all the five functions or ministries listed in 4.11. He was an apostle (1.1); he prophesied (1 Corinthians 14); he was an evangelist, preaching the gospel as a missionary to unbelievers (see Acts) and to believers (in all his letters he bases what he has to

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<sup>23</sup> See Best, 'Thieves in the Church, Ephesians 4:28', *IBS* 14 (1992) 2-9.



say on the essentials of the gospel); he wrote letters and visited the communities which he had founded to shepherd and teach their members. This is seen particularly in this letter in 4.1 where he encourages them to Christian behaviour and where he prays for them in 1.15ff; 3.14ff. He was also the recipient of divine revelation (3.3) and had a special place in the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles (3.7-9). He thus appears to allocate to himself a unique place in salvation history. This is not out of accord with some of what he says about his ministry elsewhere. He identifies himself as the last in the line of those to whom the risen Jesus appeared (1 Cor. 15.8); he says the gospel came to him through revelation (Gal. 1.12); unlike other preachers he calls on his converts to imitate him (1 Cor. 4.16; 11.1; Phil. 3.17).

If the author of Ephesians was not Paul then he certainly conceived of Paul's ministry in the way we have just seen the letter depicts it. But how then did our author conceive his own ministry? He would probably not have described himself as an apostle if that term is taken to imply someone of a rank equal to that of the Twelve, though he might have thought of himself as an apostle on a lower scale. There is nothing 'prophetic' about his writing in the sense of the way he uses the term in 2.20 or the way many envisage prophecy as a foretelling of the future. But he does proclaim the essentials of the gospel to his readers, teaches them about the O.T., and expounds and re-applies earlier tradition. We do not know enough about what he meant by shepherd to decide whether he thought he was shepherding his readers, but probably he did. He would then have fulfilled in his own way the three continuing ministries of 4.11.

### *Clergy and laity*

We have suggested that Ephesians contains the beginnings of the distinction between 'officials' and ordinary believers, yet it is not easy to determine precisely how that distinction is envisaged. There does not appear to be any area of ministry carefully marked out (e.g. presiding at the Eucharist) into which non-ministerial believers might not enter. When they address one another in song they are presumably doing much the same as leaders who teach and shepherd and who drive home the meaning of the Gospel. They

have a prayer ministry just as much as had Paul (6.18-20). They are joined with their leaders in the building up of the body of Christ (note the 'we all' at the beginning of v.13). Nothing is ever said about the need for them to approach those outside the church but then that part of the activity of evangelists is not featured in the letter. It may be that if we knew more about the roles of teachers, shepherds and evangelists we would see a distinction between them and all believers. But the author of Ephesians has not spelt out the roles of these ministers; he may not have needed to because everyone was aware what these roles were or because he was writing a letter to a number of churches and roles would have varied from congregation to congregation or because they just did what everyone else did but devoted more time and energy to it. Teachers and shepherds were terms drawn from the secular world where they had already been applied to leaders. If leaders were just those who devoted more time and energy to teaching and shepherding than others in the church then it may be that our initial assertion that the author conceived of ministry primarily in a theological manner and not in a sociological may not be wholly correct. He may have thought he was making theological statements in 2.20; 3.5; 4.11 but in fact have been responding to the pressures which appear in every new and growing group and these pressures include a veneration of founders. Leaders then were not people who had special tasks within the whole but people who exercised the roles which were open to all but in a special way. It should be noted finally that in Ephesians ministerial roles are not directly linked to varying functions in the body as in Rom.3.3ff; 1 Cor.12.12ff.

Ernest Best.



**'Good Master' and the 'Good' Sayings in the Teaching of Jesus**

Reverend Professor J.C. O'Neill

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*In honour of Ernst Käsemann (\*12. Juli 1906) who taught us that the greatest matters depend on the closest possible attention to detail.*

In Mark 10:17-19 there is a report of an exchange between a man and Jesus in which Jesus seems to deny to any human being the right to be called good, for 'No one is good except one, God'. Jesus seems therefore to deny that he is good. The Church Fathers took the point differently. They argued that Jesus is congratulating the man on his having discerned that the one he called 'good' was in fact God. This traditional explanation of the scene is hardly likely to appeal to modern readers, for surely the man would not have understood Jesus' alleged point.

Many commentators have drawn attention to the different version of the incident preserved in Matthew's Gospel, where the man asks about 'the good', and these commentators have concluded that Matthew was embarrassed about the possible implications of Mark's account of the incident and changed it (Matt 19:16-17).

This explanation for the difference between Matthew and Mark we can set aside. The reason this explanation fails is that Matthew's version still contains the difficulty the alleged change was supposed to remove. Matthew allows Jesus to go on to say, 'Why do you ask me about the good? One person is good.' The man who asks about the good is told that Jesus is not the one to ask because he is not good; only one person is good, namely God. That is the very difficulty that Matthew allegedly removed by his earlier 'change'.

Let us start with Mark's account. This account can hardly be an actual historical report of the man's question and Jesus' answers. Verse 18 clearly disrupts the natural flow from verse 17 to verse 19; the man respectfully addressed Jesus and asked about what he should do to inherit life. He got a considerate answer, beginning, 'You know the commandments'. It would have been impertinent of

Jesus to quibble with the terms of address the man had used. The man was asking an urgent question and the polite form of address he used was only a convention, having nothing more to do with the question than to signal that the man regarded Jesus as a reliable teacher in religious matters. The form of address, 'O good one', is quite common in Greek (e.g. Plato, *Protagoras* 311A; 314D; 339C) and not unknown in rabbinic accounts (A voice in a dream to Eleazar of Hagraunia: 'Good greeting to the good Rabbi from the good Lord', b.Taan 24b). Jacob addresses Joseph as ὦ τέκνον χρηστόν in TBenj 3:7. Moreover, the quibble was senseless. The reason the man called Jesus 'good' was obvious; he could have meant nothing more than that he honoured Jesus as a teacher.

But Jesus has a second remark to add to his question. He adds the information that no one is good except God. This is equally beside the point. There is an obvious sense in which no one is good except God, the sense in which no goodness can compete with God's goodness, and no goodness can exist without the prior existence of the good Lord. The statement is not meant to exclude the possibility of calling creatures 'good', and they are frequently called so in our literature (2 Sam 18:27; Prov 12:2; Qoh 9:2; TSym 4:4; TDan 1:4; TAsher 4:1; Matt 12:35; Luke 23:50). Yet the statement in this context only has point if it is taken to exclude calling anyone good except God.

When the two are taken together, the question of Jesus and the theological statement, the reader must think that Jesus is raising the problem about whether or not he is God. It is extremely unlikely that Jesus would raise the question at all, for such speculation is foreign to the accounts of his teaching in the Synoptic Gospels. It is even more unlikely that he would raise the question in the by-play before he got down to answering the serious question posed him by the man.

I wish to propose that Mark's account is a collection of originally independent sayings, each of which contained the word 'good'. Each taken by itself makes perfect sense. The combination causes havoc to modern historical readers - but, of course, the combination raised no problems for the original compiler. He knew

Jesus was God; by putting together the independent question, 'Why call me good?' and the independent statement, 'No one is good save God' with the request of the man who asked what he should do to inherit eternal life and the bare tradition that Jesus was once called 'Good Teacher', he believed that he was simply confirming the second article of the creed.

Is there any evidence to make such a hypothesis as I am advancing at all likely? The failure of previous scholars to agree on a satisfactory solution of the enigma at least emboldens us to cast our net wider. Curiously enough, it is the text of Matthew's version that begins to provide us with solid grounds for entertaining a solution on the lines suggested.

Let us print the text of the Codex Vaticanus of Matt 19:16-17 (ignoring the first hand's omission of εἰς ) alongside the text of the Textus Receptus; and then let us add the text of Justin Martyr *Apol.* I 16:6-7 and *Dial.* 101:2.

Vaticanus	TR	Apol	Dial
διδάσκαλε	διδάσκαλε	διδάσκαλε	διδάσκαλε
	ἀγαθέ	ἀγαθέ	ἀγαθέ
Τί ἀγαθὸν	Τί ἀγαθὸν		
ποιήσω	ποιήσω		
ἵνα σχῶ	ἵνα ἔχω		
ζωὴν	ζωὴν		
αἰώνιον	αἰώνιον		
Τί με	Τί με		Τί με
ἐρωτᾷς	λέγεις		λέγεις
περὶ τοῦ			
ἀγαθοῦ	ἀγαθοῦ		ἀγαθοῦ
εἷς ἐστίν	οὐδεὶς	οὐδεὶς	εἷς ἐστίν
ὁ ἀγαθός	ἀγαθός	ἀγαθός	ἀγαθός
	εἰ μὴ μόνος	εἰ μὴ μόνος	
	ὁ θεός	ὁ θεός	
		ὁ ποιήσας	ὁ πατήρ μου
		τὰ πάντα	ὁ ἐν τοῖς
			οὐρανοῖς

Note the following features of the textual tradition.



a) The Textus Receptus of Matthew and the text of the Codex Vaticanus in Matthew agree against Mark 10:17 and Luke 18:18 in making the question a question about what good thing should be done to have eternal life; Mark and Luke have simply 'What should I do to inherit eternal life?' Mark and Luke's form is found independently in Luke 10:25.

b) Luke 10:25 begins simply 'Teacher', in this agreeing with the Vaticanus of Matt 19:16 against the Textus Receptus of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Both Justin's versions begin 'Good Teacher', but neither of Justin's versions has a question similar to the question noted in (a) above.

c) Jesus' reply has two parts, a counter-question and a statement. In the Vaticanus version of Matthew, Jesus raises the counter-question, 'Why do you ask me about the good?' In the Textus Receptus of Matthew and in Justin's *Dialogue* (but not in Justin's *Apology*) the counter-question is in the form, 'Why call me good?' Justin's *Apology* has nothing equivalent.

d) When we come to the statement, the form of the Vaticanus version, 'One is good', agrees with the form of the statement in Justin's *Dialogue*, whereas the form of the statement in the Textus Receptus of Matthew agrees with the form of the statement in Justin's *Apology*, as with the form in Mark and Luke: 'No one is good except one...'

What are we to conclude from these observations? It is highly unlikely that the Textus Receptus of Matthew is simply a 'correction' of Matthew according to the pattern provided by Mark and Luke, for the Textus Receptus agrees with Mark and Luke in features (b), (c), and (d), but not in feature (a). Why should feature (a) escape 'correction' along with (b), (c), and (d)? Nor is it likely that the Codex Vaticanus form of Matthew is a 'correction' of the Textus Receptus form. Feature (b) might be considered such, were it not that we have an independent version in Luke 10:25 that prefaced a request by the simple, 'Teacher!' We could entertain a theory that the Codex Vaticanus version had 'corrected' the Textus

Receptus by making Jesus' counter-question, 'Why do you ask me concerning the good?', but it is hard to see why the following statement 'One is good' was made as a 'correction' of 'No one is good except One'. Here the two versions in Justin come in to play to suggest a simpler explanation than the various theories that one editor was 'correcting' another: Justin's *Apology* has no counter-question and it has the version of the statement about God that agrees with the Textus Receptus of Matthew, whereas Justin's *Dialogue* has a counter-question that agrees with the the Textus Receptus of Matthew and a version of the statement about God that agrees with the Vaticanus version of the statement about God in Matthew.

The simplest hypothesis is that there were in circulation two versions of the address (feature b): 'Teacher!' and 'Good Teacher!'; two versions of the question (feature a); two versions of the counter-question (feature c); and two versions of the statement about God (feature d). Different combinations of these features came independently to each of our four streams of tradition. Curiously, the Codex Vaticanus of Matthew and the Textus Receptus of Matthew seem to show variant versions of similar traditions; either one displaced the other, or each was an independent insertion of similar (but different) material at the same place.

So far I have confined our attention to a relatively restricted body of evidence about these sayings. The time has come to bring in some further evidence. When this evidence is taken into account, we have good grounds for supposing that there were in circulation nine separate sayings that involve the word 'good' and a tenth that also needs to be taken into account even although it does not contain the word 'good'. The ten sayings, with the supporting evidence, are as follows. The sayings are numbered 1-10, but, as 1 and 2 are alternatives, 3 and 4 are alternatives, 5-7 are variants of the same idea, and 8-10 are variants of the same idea, these sayings are grouped under the capital letters A, B, C and D.

A

1. διδάσκαλε

Matt 19:16 B  
Luke 10:25; om. D  
magister  
Ev. sec. Hebraeos (Origen, *Comm. in Matt.* 15:14)

ῥαββουνί (ὃ λέγεται διδασκάλε)  
John 20:16  
Cf. John 13:13; Matt 23:8,10

διδασκάλε Ἰησοῦ  
Papyrus Egerton 2 (frag. 2r)

2. διδασκάλε ἀγαθέ  
Matt 19:16 TR; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18  
Justin, *Apol.* I 16:7; *Dial.* 101:2  
Marcion (Epiphanius, *Schol.* 50 (42.11.17))  
Irenaeus 1.13.2 (Harvey 1.178)  
Adamantius, *Dial.* II.17  
Marcosians (Epiphanius, *Pan. haer.* 34.18.11)  
Ephrem, *Comm.* 15.2

B

3. Τί ἀγαθὸν ποιήσου ἵνα ἔχω/σχῶ ζωὴν αἰώνιον;  
Matt 19:16 TR/B  
quid bonum faciens vivam?  
Ev. sec. Hebraeos (Origen, *Comm. in Matt.* 15:14)

4. Τί ποιήσω ἵνα ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω;  
Mark 10:17  
Τί ποιήσας ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω;  
Luke 10:25; 18:18  
Marcion (Epiphanius, *Schol.* 50 (42.11.15)  
Adamantius, *Dial.* II.17

C

5. Τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν;  
Matt 19:17 TR; om. Γ  
Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19  
Marcion (Hippolytus, *Refut. omn. haer.* vii.31.6)



Justin, *Dial.* 101:2

Ev. Naassen. (Hippolytus, *Refut. omn. haer.* v.7.26)

Marcosians (Epiphanius, *Pan. haer.* 34.18.11)

Arians (Epiphanius, *Pan haer.* 69.19.1)

Adamantius, *Dial.* II.17

Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.13.2 (Harvey 1.178)

Τί με λέγετε ἀγαθόν

Marcion (Hippolytus, *Refut. omn. haer.* vii.31.6)

Τί με καλεῖτε τῷ στόματι ὑμῶν διδάσκαλον

μὴ ἀκούοντες ὃ λέγω;

Papyrus Egerton 2 (frag. 2r)

Τί δέ με καλεῖτε κύριε κύριε καὶ οὐ ποιεῖτε ἃ λέγω;

Luke 6:46

6. μή με λέγε ἀγαθόν

Marcion (Epiphanius, *Schol.* 50 (42.11.15))

Simon Magus (PsClement, *Hom.* 18.1)

7. τί με ἐρωτᾷς περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ;

Matt 19:17 B

Luke 18:19 sy<sup>c</sup>

D

8. οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ ὁ θεός.

Matt 19:17 TR; Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19

Adamantius, *Dial.* II.17; cf. I.1

οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ ὁ μόνος ὁ θεός

Justin, *Apol.* I 16:7; cf. Mark 10:18 D

nemo bonus praeter unum sit deum patrem

Origen, *De princip.* ii.5.1

οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς

Clement, *Paed.* 1.8 (72.2; cf. 74.1)

non est bonus nisi unus pater qui in caelo

Ephrem, *Comm.* 15.2 (Leloir, Syriac 140;

cf. Syriac & Armenian 264)

9. εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ ἀγαθός.

Matt 19:17 B

Marcion (Epiphanius, Schol. 50 (42.11.15))

εἷς ἐστὶν ἀγαθός

Justin, Dial. 101.2

Ev. Naassen. (Hippolytus, *Refut. omn. haer.* v.7.26)

Marcion (Hippolytus, *Refut omn. haer.* vii.31.6)

Marcosians (Epiphanius, *Pan. haer.* 34.18.11)

Arians (Epiphanius, *Pan haer.* 69.19.1)

Valentinus (Clement, *Strom.* 2.20 (114.3.6))

Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.13.2 (Harvey 1.178)

εἷς ... μόνος ἐστὶν ἀγαθός

Ptolemaeus, *Epist. ad Florum.* 5.4 (Epiphanius,

*Pan haer.* 33.7.5)

ὁ ...ἀγαθός εἷς ἐστὶν

Simon Magus (PsClement, *Hom.* 18.1)

10. Τίς ἐστὶν ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός;

sed quis optimus nisi unus...deus?

Marcion (Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* iv.36.3)

Observe that the sources contain one, two, three or all four of the categories A, B, C and D.

**One** of the possible four categories:

D8: Adamantius I; Origen; Clement

D9: Ptolemaeus; Valentinus

D10: Marcion (Tertullian)

**Two** of the possible four categories:

A+B

1+3: Ev. Heb.

A+C

1+5: Pap. Egerton 2

A+D

2+8: Justin, *Apol.*; Ephrem

C+D

5+9: Marcion (Hippolytus); Arians

6+9: Simon Magus

**Three** of the possible four categories:

A+C+D

2+5+9: Justin, *Dial.*; Marcosians; Irenaeus

**Four** of the possible four categories:

A+B+C+D

1+3+7+9: Matthew B

2+3+5+8: Matthew TR

2+4+5+8: Mark; Luke; Adamantius II

2+4+6+9: Marcion (Epiphanius)

We are not surprised to find sayings in category D standing alone. There was already in the Old Testament the command to give thanks unto the Lord for he is good (Psalm 117(118):1,29; 53(54):6 &c.; cf. 1 Chron 16:34; 2 Chron 5:13; 2 Esdras (4 Ezra) 8:52; Philo, *Leg. alleg.* i.47; *De somn.* i.149). A statement analogous to the idea that God alone is good is found in 1 Kgs (1 Sam) 2.2:ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἅγιος ὡς κύριος καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν. οὐκ ἔστιν ἅγιος πλὴν σοῦ. A similar idea also occurs in the sayings of Jesus at Matt 23:9:καὶ πατέρα μὴ καλέσητε ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, εἰς γὰρ ἔστιν ὑμῶν ὁ πατὴρ ὁ οὐράνιος. Jesus of course did not mean that people were to cease addressing their earthly fathers as 'Father'; rather, no earthly father, however good, could rival the Father in heaven, ἐξ οὗ πᾶσα πατριὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς ὀνομάζεται (Eph 3:15).

However, there are strong grounds for believing that sayings from all four categories, even the first, could have originally been transmitted alone. In the sources with only two of the four categories we find A combined with each of B and C and D. Sayings in category A would very naturally be found with other sayings, so that we are justified in concluding that B and C as well as D sometimes stood alone. It is possible, but not likely, that our



sources containing one or two or three categories of sayings were always giving only extracts from longer collections containing all four types of sayings. It is likely that some, if not all, of the cases of exact agreement show literary dependence (e.g. 2+4+5+8: Mark, Luke, Adamantius II). But once we leave the cases of exact agreement, there is no obvious master combination that has been altered by editorial activity. Each difference which, taken by itself might be thought an editorial alteration, is always found intact in some other context. The strongest candidate for being regarded as an editorial alteration is No. 7 above; search for knowledge of 'the good' was a prime activity of Greek philosophers (e.g. Plato, *Republic* Book 6 [505-506]). Yet even No. 7 is also found complete in the Syriac Curetonian version of Luke 18:19. It is just as likely that Jesus, in an independent tradition, was thought to have enquired why a questioner imagined that a Galilean teacher could pronounce on the key philosophical issue of the day as that an editor introduced this point by changing 'Why call me good?'

The impression that sayings in each category originally stood alone is heightened when we look more closely at the sayings one by one. The hardest to imagine as standing alone are the sayings in group A, and my theory would not be greatly harmed if anyone should assert that sayings in the other three categories usually had an introduction, 'Teacher' or 'Good teacher', and that these addresses were too enclitic ever to have stood alone. The case for saying that they could have been transmitted alone rests on a scrap of evidence from John's Gospel and some general observations. In John 20:16 (cf. 13:13) Mary greets the risen Lord with the one word of homage, ῥαββουνί. Here at least is one occasion when the address is preserved without any further statement or request. That Jesus was addressed as 'Good teacher' might well have been so rare and unusual that tradition recollected it without any further information about who said it or in what circumstances it was said. We recall that the three addresses κύριε, διδάσκαλε and ἐπιστάτα were in all likelihood variant translations of the one Hebrew or Aramaic address of the sailors to Jesus in the storm (Matt 8:25; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:24), so that any anticipations of the early Christian confession κύριος would be treasured by the tradition (1 Cor 12:3).

The case for holding that sayings in group B were transmitted without C- or D-type sayings hardly needs arguing. The question about what to do to be saved was a standing question, asked by everyone who had received a glimpse of a day of judgment lying ahead (Luke 3:10; 10:25; Acts 2:37; 16:30).

The heart of my case is to show that the sayings in group C originally stood alone and historically were not the prelude to the denial that anyone was good except God. The key to the problem is the realisation that sayings 5 and 6 were elliptical. The question, 'Why call me good?' implied: 'and do not do what I say', and the command, 'Do not call me good' implied: 'if you do not do what I say'. This natural reading is confirmed by two analogous sayings, Papyrus Egerton 2, 'Why do you call me with your mouth "Teacher" while not hearing what I say?', and Luke 6:46, 'Why do you call me "Lord, Lord" and do not do what I say?'

Saying 7 is a rather different variant of the same thing. It too is elliptical. The understood answer to the question, 'Why ask me about the good?' is 'You have Moses and the prophets' (cf. ἔχουσιν Μωϋσέα καὶ τοὺς προφῆτας Luke 16:29; cf. Luke 16:31; John 5:45-47; Papyrus Egerton 2 frag. 1v).

The combination of saying A2 with all or some of types B, C and D was perfectly natural, and once saying A1 was combined with B3, the urge to add one or both of the two remaining categories would be irresistible. We have long known that Jewish and Christian sayings were gathered according to catch-words. Here the catch-word was the word 'good'. The collectors were serenely confident that everything that was transmitted agreed in doctrine with everything else. They saw sayings of type C cohering with sayings of type D because Jesus was the incarnate Son of God and the reason people could call him good when God alone was good was because he was God. They did not wonder that a question about what to do to inherit eternal life should be turned aside into an enquiry about who alone was good, because what one did and what one believed about God and his Son were closely intertwined. They did not think it odd that Jesus should pick up the

fact that he was addressed as 'Good teacher' in order to launch into a discourse on the only good One, namely God. We, quite rightly, cannot regard these combinations as realistic descriptions of any one encounter of Jesus with an earnest enquirer. But once we understand the history of the tradition, we begin to recover a set of entirely realistic sayings: one address to Jesus and three pronouncements of Jesus. Jesus was addressed as 'Teacher' and 'Good teacher'. He was asked what to do to have eternal life. He often pressed his admirers with the question, 'Why do you call me good?'. He also asserted that no one is good save God.

The key to the difficulties raised by this, perhaps the most difficult passage in all the Gospels, is to understand that we are dealing with the work of collectors. The collectors were collectors of what was given to be treasured; the best way, almost the only way they knew to preserve the treasures was, like makers of mosaics, to set the treasured sayings into a picture. Small mosaics were enlarged and added to other mosaics. The most extensive mosaics, but not the only surviving examples, are our Gospels. We can still enjoy the various tiny collections that preserved the 'good' sayings, but we need also to see that the individual coloured pieces were originally separate, each telling a different story without at all contradicting one another or getting in one another's way.

12 July, 1993



J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (New York/London etc: Doubleday, 1991)

As the cliché has it, 'You should never judge a book by its cover'. This first volume of Meier's *A Marginal Jew* has a striking picture of a teenage boy with a halo and one would thus be forgiven for thinking here is a case of scholarly popularization. There is fine scholarship in evidence here, and if it becomes popular, then all to the good. What Meier tries to do is to pretend that a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jew and agnostic have been 'locked up in the bowels of the Harvard Divinity School library, put on a spartan diet, and not allowed to emerge until they had hammered out a consensus document on who Jesus was and what he intended in his own time and place' (p.1). One may quibble with the detail of Meier's results. But it is a magnificent effort, and for once the accolades of fellow-scholars on the dustwrapper really do seem appropriate. I shall suggest four of the book's strengths before going on to explore five questions I am left with.

First a word about the book's structure. What we have here in this first of a projected two volumes are seven chapters about methodology (Part One) and four about background (Part Two). Part Two creates a framework within which we shall then on to hear about the life and work of Jesus from Nazareth during the little over two years that he spent in full-time itinerant ministry between the years of 28 and 30 AD.

Doing a bit of simple adding up reveals that the substance of the book -- about 430 pp -- consists of over 240 pp of main text and over 180 pp of footnotes. If we can speak in general terms, then, about 45% of the text is footnotes, some of which are very lengthy and detailed indeed. In the footnotes you effectively find an excursus or two — on the textual arguments for the *Testimonium Flavianum* of Josephus being accepted wholly or in part as authentic (p 80-83) or on the literary genre of gospel, for example (pp. 143-5). So Meier is covering his scholarly back quite well, whilst also wanting to engage a wider audience. A nice touch — stressing the thoroughly human dimension to scholarly research — can be seen in the frequent references Meier makes to

correspondence with his editor, David Noel Freedman. It must have been a fascinating exchange of letters!

The engaging style is a second point. He writes in an almost entertaining fashion with not a little humour e.g. in beginning to map out his methodology he writes: 'there is no neutral Switzerland of the mind in the world of Jesus research' (p. 5); or when exploring the birth narratives: 'Zechariah, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, Herod, the Magi, and the Bethlehem shepherds were all presumably deceased or otherwise "unavailable for comment" as the infancy traditions were developed in the first two Christian generations.' (p. 209)

Some of the engaging style is about the boldness with which Meier at times states his case. Scholarly caution is not replaced by brash assertion. Far from it. But the acknowledgement that Meier has a *responsibility* as a scholar to make firm commitments based on available evidence is striking throughout. On this basis it is possible to go through the work and — especially in Part Two — distil from his patient enquiries very firm conclusions. Meier even gives us a helpful potted summary of what we carry forward to Volume Two (p. 407).

Perhaps such boldness in drawing conclusions relates to his assumptions about method. The Catholic, Protestant, Jew and agnostic that Meier, in his imagination, has sent down to the bowels of Harvard Library are 'all honest historians cognizant of 1st-century religious movements' and they are to complete their work 'on purely historical sources and arguments' (p. 1). I read these words on the opening page with some degree of disappointment. Was Meier really going to be as clued up as J. D. Crossan about the complexity of the historian's task? Was he going to end up as naively positivist as E. P. Sanders?

The answer is that he isn't as clued up as Crossan, but isn't as naive as Sanders. The Introduction and opening chapters are at least an attempt to address issues which Sanders doesn't really address at all (in examining the very term 'historical Jesus', what we mean by 'real Jesus', and the elusive character of objectivity in

all historical study). But there remains the positivist in Meier — as there has to be in any historian, in fact — and enough of a positivist to be firm in conclusion.

All these four points: helpful structure, good style, firm conclusions, good methodological work are great strengths in the book. But now let us move to discussion points.

### **1. Meier's reading of objectivity in Jesus Research is too simple.**

PP. 4-6 is a crucial section in his Part One and could have been longer. It was a pleasure to read a NT scholar writing 'I would be delighted if systematic theologians would pick up where this book leaves off ..' (p. 6). Clearly there are distinct tasks here, otherwise we would not be able to talk at all of historians and theologians. But I don't think it is even as simple as acknowledging your bias and then trying to allow for it — which is the methodological line Meier follows. Indeed, I think Meier half knows that to be so when towards the end of Chapter One, he writes 'while the scholar may try to prescind from a specifically Christian or ecclesiastical commitment, a more general "existential commitment", a concern about what Jesus may mean for human life today, necessarily energizes the historical quest.' (p. 31). I believe that to be true, though would want to check it out especially with the agnostic living off bread and water in Harvard library. I'd be interested to know the way in which s/he would construe that existential dimension to Jesus research. But even so, if that existential commitment is there in some form, then the constant interrelationship between the material and one's own commitments is likely to be more telling than I think Meier allows.

To give two examples: first, some of the questions posed in the book are formulated in such a way, or developed at such a length, precisely because of Meier's own Roman Catholic background and his assumed wide Roman Catholic readership. The impact of that on the process of enquiry and its conclusions is perhaps more subtle than Meier allows. A second example is the important but exasperatingly short and incomplete chapter 7,



entitled: Conclusion to Part One; Why Bother? The Relevance of the Quest for the Historical Jesus. One obvious response to the title is 'relevant to what or to whom?'. Of course, the chapter is all about the relationship between Jesus research and Christian systematic theology. But the starving agnostic might be driven just as much by a humanistic concern to get at what Jesus was about as in showing that Christians or Jews might be mistaken. Meier's reading of relevance momentarily doesn't do fullest justice to the context within which he has set out to undertake his historical work.

I know that historical self-consciousness can be taken to alarming limits and end up as a kind of post-modern narcissism. But some more attention to this whole area would, I think have been welcome.

## **2. Have we really come quite as far as Meier claims in using John's Gospel as on a par with the Synoptics for Jesus research?**

Meier attacks the post-Bultmannians on this question. On p. 45, in his discussion of the use of books of the New Testament canon in Jesus research, Meier writes: '...the "tyranny of the Synoptics Jesus"' should be consigned to the dustbin of post-Bultmannians.' We see in practice, throughout his work, how he makes use of the Fourth Gospel in a similar way to the other three canonical Gospels. In his final chapter, for example, he ends up agreeing with John over against the Synoptics in seeing the Last Supper as a solemn meal prior to the celebration of Passover rather than as itself a Passover meal (pp. 386-401; esp. p. 395).

Meier is, of course, by no means unaware that John is quite different. But he stresses that this is a difference in degree rather than in kind ('to be sure, the rewriting of narratives for symbolic purposes and the reformulation of sayings for theological programs reach their high point in John. Yet such tendencies are not totally absent from the Synoptics ...'p. 45). Such a conclusion is, of course, commonplace in the wake of redaction criticism. But as we all know, it has led to some rather sweeping and all-too-simple conclusions which suggest that the Fourth Gospel suddenly

becomes no different from the Synoptics and can be used in precisely that way. Meier's thoroughness and caution prevent things getting out of hand in this book. But it will be interesting to see where this methodological premiss takes him. There is always likely to be a tendency — from this starting-point — to find out all sorts of things about Jesus which are only found in John! We shall see.

### **3. Is the rejection of non-canonical material quite as clear-cut as Meier claims?**

If the, in the end, rather uncritical use of non-canonical material may prove to be the Achilles heel of Crossan's recent work *The Historical Jesus*, then a weakness of Meier's is precisely the reverse. With the exception of a few sentences from Josephus, all non-canonical material is excluded. But the basic 'working reason' for the exclusion is worth examining closely. The reason so often given throughout the work seems to be 'because it adds so little to what we know already' (see e.g. p. 130). But isn't that prejudging the issue? Of course, we're touching on an aspect of circularity here: where is it sensible to start when getting a grasp on a working picture of Jesus from Nazareth which then becomes normative by which other material can be judged? But even though, to give him his due, Meier doesn't simply begin with the canonical Gospels and say that's all there is to look at, they undoubtedly create his framework and other Gospels are brought in only for checking purposes (p. 139). There is a revealing statement hidden away in a footnote on p. 166 (n. 146), where Meier notes that 'no method can control the haphazard or random occurrence in history that runs counter to the general impression the data give. But such an isolated, random datum would make no difference in the overall picture we draw of Jesus.'

There are two points here: first, there's the problem of how to deal with the unusual (even the unique) in historical research; second, there's the issue of where you start — the circularity involved in a basic picture to which we've just referred. I don't think Meier attends enough to the significance of how he's got his basic picture.

There may — indeed there surely are — some key questions about the whole approach to Jesus Research currently underway which finds a Cynic and very postmodern Jesus neatly tucked away in Q and apocryphal material just waiting to be uncovered. But to acknowledge problems doesn't necessarily mean that the sheer complex interwovenness of what may be historical between canonical and non-canonical material can be easily unravelled.

#### **4. Has Meier made sufficiently clear how he's using the term 'marginal'**

Stephen Cory makes this point in a review in *JR* 73 (1993) pp. 402-4. Cory writes: 'Meier lists six "aspects" of marginality .. most of which make one wonder what exactly he means by the term ... Perhaps by "marginal" Meier means to make Jesus a sort of Everyman, but his central point needs clarification.' I share this criticism, though Meier may perhaps come back to this question at the end of volume 2. What he has done, though, is given us a key term which frames the whole of his undertaking whilst at the same time saying that it is an elusive and imprecise term. There is a problem here, especially as Meier stresses the need to clarify which strand or strands of Judaism Jesus emerges from. This is necessary not only to help clarify issues of similarity to and difference from Judaism (and the knock-on effect that such considerations have on criteria for determining the authenticity of words of Jesus). It is also very much a question of how Jesus relates to emergent Christianity (both a historical and a theological question).

It matters whether Jesus was marginal because he started there (be it, say, socially or geographically), whether he chose to be marginal (by choosing a particular course of action) or whether he was pushed there (through creating conflict, being rejected or whatever). Meier sees these distinctions, and refers to the work of sociologists (who often seem to talk more about having no option in being marginalized e.g. landless poor), though as yet keeps us guessing as to his reading of the full significance of the term. But it is worth saying that Jesus may only seem like a marginal Jew *at all* from a Christian perspective. He might seem a quite mainstream Jew through Jewish eyes. Or, to put it another way, if he is



shocking and unconventional to Jewish hearers (and that's the hallmark of his marginality), he surely remains equally so to Christians. If we can talk, then, of Jesus from Nazareth and Christianity at all in the same breath, then we should talk very much in terms of Jesus the marginal Christian.

### **5. Was Jesus' lay status quite as much of an issue as Meier makes out?**

Here we are dealing with Meier's reading of first-century Judaism. But it also clearly a case of his reading being informed by his own participation in a religious group, through his perception of the relationship between lay and ordained in Christianity (in his case Roman Catholicism). It is interesting to note that the notion of marginality is picked up immediately in this section (pp. 345-349):

Simply by being a layman from an obscure town in the countryside of lower Galilee, Jesus was already marginal to the holders of religious power when he set foot in Jerusalem. (p. 345)

Meier's highlighting of the distinctions between Sadducees (as priests and lay aristocracy), Pharisees (predominantly lay) and Scribes (always lay) is helpful. But I wonder whether his own analysis doesn't again point to the oversimplification of his reading Jesus' — what we might call — 'religious status' through later spectacles. In handling the conflicts into which Jesus of Nazareth appears to have been drawn we are dealing with lay against lay as well as lay against ordained (if we may so put it). At this point I missed clarity on Meier's part apart from whether the lay/ordained status really would have been as much of a first-century issue as Meier makes out.

These are, then, five discussion themes. They demonstrate that the book is not beyond fault, but also that it is immensely stimulating. For anyone interested in the current state of Jesus research, the book is a must.

**Clive Marsh, Sheffield**

Ron Elsdon, *Greenhouse Theology : Biblical Perspectives on Caring for Creation*, Monarch Publications, 1992, pp. 253, ISBN 1 85424 1532.

Elsdon's treatment of the issue of environmental concern is an exercise in relating the Bible to the problems of the modern world (p.23). The core of the book is the development of a biblical theology of the 'goodness of creation' (p.8-9). Elsdon suggests that in the Old Testament the goodness of creation is understood in terms of the witness of the created order to God -reflecting, in particular, the unity in diversity of God-in-Trinity (p.45); the beauty of the natural world (p.47); and creation as a source of joy to the Creator evidenced by God's 'celebration' of his completed work (p.50). Elsdon stresses that the goodness of creation must also be understood in terms of the capacity of the natural world to satisfy human need (p.54-56). But the biblical picture of humanity existing in solidarity with the created order means that the exercise of human dominion - which is partly what is involved in the understanding of the uniqueness of human beings as made in the image of God (p.59) - must be understood in terms of a responsible stewardship (p.64-70) and consequently cannot be regarded as legitimising the exploitation of nature (p.65).

The exercise of dominion has become disordered by the Fall (p.76) - a disorder exemplified in the history of Israel where the repercussions of disobedience and idolatry reduced a 'land of milk and honey' to a 'despoiled environment' (p.113). Elsdon's appeal to sin as explanatory of environmental harm is not vacuous - he gives detailed content to the understanding that 'because sin is not just personal and now, but also corporate and its consequences manifested in succeeding generations, undoing its effect in the world of creation is an immensely difficult and expensive business' (p.89).

But Elsdon's stress on the cosmic effects of human sinfulness (p.85) does not mean that he regards the goodness of creation as 'irrevocably ruined' (p.162) - rather he presents the restoration of creation as integral to God's purpose in salvation (p.173-174). This theme is developed in terms of a Christocentric reaffirmation in the

New Testament of the goodness of creation (p.140) and an understanding of the destiny of creation in relation to the cosmic significance of the death and resurrection of Christ (p.161).

The crucial implication of this core of Biblical Theology is that the renewal of creation is an integral part of the gospel (p.174) and consequently 'biblical Christianity demands responsible care for creation' (p.197). This means that environmental issues must not be peripheral matters of Christian concern. The biblical perspective developed by Elsdon is the basis of his treatment of 'ethical issues to do with environmental care' (p.29) - these include global warming (p.87-90); the use of science and technology (p.125-131); the environmental impact of war (p.102-107); a Christian approach to risk (p.202-213); the connection between global poverty and environmental degeneration (p.217-233) to mention a few.

Elsdon shows that a theology of the goodness of creation is a corrective to 'creation denying spirituality' (p.22) characteristic of 'Christian other-worldliness' (p.20) and also a barrier to a New Age infiltration of traditional categories of Christian belief (p.18) and perhaps the receptivity to New Age ideas of Christians actively concerned with the environment (p.18). More positively, the fact that the renewal of creation is an integral part of the gospel means that 'green issues' are 'golden opportunities' for evangelisation (p.176). Elsdon's position is that a meaningful presentation of the gospel must combine contemporary relevance by engaging the culture and thought forms of the hearers (p.178) with fidelity to God's self-revelation in Scripture (p.182). The sermons of Paul at Lystra (Acts 14: 15-18) and Athens (Acts 17: 22-31) and Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and at Solomon's Colonnade (Acts 3: 17-21) are analysed as models of effective evangelism which incorporate teaching crucial for a theology of environmental concern (p.176-192). The description of the A Rocha Project (p.193-195) shows how evangelism and environmental stewardship can be effectively combined.

Finally Elsdon argues the need for a balanced spirituality - what he calls a 'trinitarian spirituality' which 'encompasses our



experience of God as Creator' (p.246) but without marginalising the significance of the work of Christ or the Holy Spirit. Elsdon's consideration of an adequate Christian spirituality is an example of the theological balance which informs the entire book. This is important - for example, in the treatment of the twentieth century experience of inhumanity (particularly the Holocaust) by Christian writers there is a tendency to exhaust the significance of the cross in terms of God's solidarity with a suffering world. But Elsdon's theology of the goodness of creation, while presented as an integral part of the gospel, does not eclipse a traditional understanding of the work of Christ which in fact he clearly presents. This book is a comprehensive theology of environmental concern which combines theological depth and balance with clarity of style. It is quite simply an excellent examination of what Moltmann has described without exaggeration as the apocalyptic crisis of our time.

**Patrick J Roche**

Margaret Barker: *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (SPCK, 1992) (£15 UK price)

Books, even academic books, are often strangely reminiscent of their authors. Margaret Barker is a fascinating person, and her latest contribution *The Great Angel* is an equally fascinating piece of writing.

It follows upon two other 'serious' books she has produced in recent years *The Older Testament* (1987) and *The Gate of Heaven* (1991). In the first of these she attempted to show how the religion of Israel had developed before the exile, and how these older forms had continued into New Testament times. In the *Gate of Heaven* she takes the Temple as her subject and suggests how Temple imagery influenced the thinking and theology of the New Testament writers. Additionally in a more popular work *The Lost Prophet* (1988), which takes the Book of Enoch as its core subject, she explores the world of apocalyptic, which once again she views as a matrix for the New Testament. All these previous works have been challenging and thought-provoking, and as Barker herself states, it

is possible to see how they led her along the path where she has now ended up with *The Great Angel*.

Briefly, the thesis of *The Great Angel* is that the ancient religion of Israel had the belief in a High God (= Elyon) and that Yahweh, Israel's special god, was initially regarded as one of the 'sons of Elyon'. This view, Barker believes, endured into the first century BC/AD, and can help explain the divine status which was accorded to Jesus at a very early stage in the development of Christian thought. Barker culls an extraordinary wide range of sources to provide evidence for her views, ranging from the Old Testament, Wisdom writing from inside and outside the Old Testament, Philo, other Jewish writers, early Christian sources, Gnostic writings, and even the New Testament itself.

Effectively Barker is arguing that Judaism of the first century was not monotheistic, and that this fact made it a far more convenient seed-bed for Christology than it had hitherto been given credit for. We do not need to chase after the elusive spectre of Hellenism to explain the way in which the faith of Jesus became a faith about Jesus.

There is a lot in what Barker is saying, although in fact quite a lot of what she is saying has actually been said or hinted at before. Old Testament scholars have long acknowledged that the religion of pre-exilic Israel was far more variegated than either we, or the editors of the Old Testament itself, might like to believe. There was some form of pantheon, there is an ambiguity about the relative places in this of 'Yahweh' and 'Elyon', and it is even possible, or likely, that in some circles Yahweh was given a consort. Some of this can be evidenced from within the corners of the Old testament itself (the Psalms, Deuteronomy 32) and other facets from extra-biblical texts (e.g. the Kuntillat Ajrud inscriptions and Elephantine Papyri). But, and it is a big but, the query must be how far these ideas survived the various clean up operations that the faith of Israel went through between the exile and the New Testament period. Barker would respond, of course, that e.g. the Qumran texts, make it clear that there were groups away from the main stream of 'official' thought where such ideas were preserved - to act as a



launch pad for the New Testament. Now I am prepared to concede that there are at several points missing links which need to be made to understand and explain the New Testament. A prime example, which relates more to Barker's earlier work *The Gate of Heaven* is that to make sense of John's theology of the incarnation it is necessary to assume that the ancient views of the temple as the dwelling place of God were known and understood by John's readers. But I really do not think that the evidence as a whole bears the weight that Barker wishes to give to it, and that she makes massive leaps across chronological time and space which seem intrinsically implausible. Effectively the time span on which Barker is operating means that she is suggesting that we might draw a parallel with the situation of Chaucerian England and today. Do the thoughts and theology present in the *Canterbury Tales* really impact on us in late 20th Century Britain? Even allowing for a greater philosophical stability in the world of Judaism it still becomes difficult to maintain that e.g. Philo might have been directly influenced by pre-exilic polytheism in the development of his Logos theology.

Barker's chapter on Philo is perhaps one of her least plausible. It illustrates the fact that she isn't prepared to give enough weight to the metaphorical and poetic qualities of language. I am not sure whether Philo would have understood the term 'monotheist', but I am sure that if he did he would have insisted quite firmly that he was one - Logos or no Logos!

As I suggested in my opening remarks there is an interesting congruence between this book and its author. Margaret Barker is a person who after a truly brilliant career doing a first degree in theology at Cambridge University, found that the demands of her situation led to her becoming a maths teacher in a secondary school. Any theology she has done since then has really been as a private individual, as an 'amateur' and on the side. One is led to reflect wryly that if she were graduating as a woman today she might well not have to make the same choices that she did in the mid 1960s - and biblical studies would clearly be the beneficiary! But her book somehow reflects her personal situation: its strength is in its ability to paint a wide canvas; its fundamental weakness is that it is looking



at a series of texts in isolation, apparently without setting them in their historical and social context. Texts are not like that, and that is not quite how theology develops. I suspect that if Barker had had the chance for more interchange with her academic peers, her books might have felt rather different and less idiosyncratic. There probably would have been both pluses and minuses!

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